

PHILOSOPHICAL AND DEVOTIONAL ASPECTS IN THE NAUKA CHARITRAM OF SRI THYAGARAJA

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ABSTRACT

This article on Thyagaraja's Nauka Charitram is presented to bring out the various aspects by which Saint Thyagaraja portray about nature, River Yamuna, special characters of Lord Krishna, the way by which Gopi-s express their feelings and expressions on the boat ride, the way by which Gopi-s spend their time with Lord Krishna touching upon the philosophical aspects. This article narrates on how complete surrender to the supreme helps us to cross the life journey smoothly.

Keywords: Philosophy, Devotion, Nauka Charitram, Sri Thyagaraja

Introduction

The main purpose of our birth is that the jivātma (human being) should attain the state of Paramātma (Supreme Power). The state of paramātma is the oneness that all the souls are the same without having the sense of pride, ego, jealous, hatred, fear, etc., In the life journey, one does not realize that and shows ego, pride, etc., towards one another. Constantly meditating upon the Divine helps in completely surrendering to the Universe by seeking forgiveness, cross the life journey with acceptance in the path and attain the state of Moksha(salvation).

The term 'Gēyanāṭaka' refers to Musical play. It is referred as 'Isai Nāṭakam' in Tamil and 'opera' in English. 'Gēyanāṭaka' includes Poetry, music, dance, drama, special theme and characters to exhibit them. It requires a special genius to compose Geyanataka like musical proficiency – to bring out varieties in terms of Rāga, Tāḷa, bhava, rasa(raga that has to be suitably chosen to exhibit the nava rasa-s)¹, combination, flow and contrasts on the sequence of the ragas, literary and poetic skill, command of vocabulary, unbound imagination, flow of the sequence as in drama conveying the essence of the original theme constantly. In 'Gēyanāṭaka'-s, the story is narrated through Director known as Sutradāra in the form of narrative passages known as vacana-s and poetic verses known as Padya-s sung by various characters and the songs are known as daru-s. The daru-s and Padya-s were descriptive and Vacana-s served as a link between the two. The structure of Daru comprises of Pallavi and Caraṇa or Pallavi-Anupallavi and Caraṇa. The structure of Padya is based on metres like Dvipada, kanda, etc.,²

Some of the operas include Jayadeva's Ashtapati, Krishna Leela Tarangini by Narayana Theerthar, Nandanar Charitram by Gopala Krishna Bharathi, Rama Natakam by Arunachala Kaviraayar. Thyagaraja has to his credit two master plays – Nauka charitram and Prahlāda Bhakti Vijayam composed in Telugu. Nauka charitram comprises of 21 Kritis set in 13 different Rāga-s such as Bhairavi, DevaGandhari, Ghanta, Kapi, Mohana, Panthuvrali, Punnavarali, Saranga, Saurashtram, Saveri, Suruti, Varali and Yadhukula Khamboji set to Adi, Chapu, Rupaka and Tripata Tāḷa-s. In most of the kritis Pallavi is sung by a Gopi and Charana-s are sung by other Gopi-s. Thyagaraja's mudra is provided in all the dara-s except the 10th Daru, "Cūtāmūrārē".

Background of the play

The term 'Nauka' refers to boat. 'NaukaCharitra' is a story of the travel of Krishna and Gopika, the cowherd women in boat. Nauka Charitram can be divided into two halves. In the first part, the gopi-s

¹ Navarasas include Srīngara (Love/beauty), Hasya (Laughter), Karuna - (compassion), Raudra (anger), Vira(Courage), bhayanaka (Fear), bhīḥatsa (disgust), Aḥbata (Surprise) and Shanta (Peace)

² P-33 Y.Bhagavathi

exhibit their emotions in the form of ego, jealousy, love, arrogance, pride, etc., by making fun of Krishna stating him as innocent boy and mocking him in different ways. In the second part, the gopi-s face distress, calamity, etc., as Krishna creates terrific storm through his omnipotence and a hole in the boat. Water rushes into the boat threatening the boat to sink. Gopi-s appeal to almighty Sri Krishna for help. Krishna suggests them to remove their garments and put them in the hole to stop the leakage. Gopi-s follow his instructions. But to their surprise the clothes are washed away. They completely surrender to Lord Krishna for help. Krishna makes the storm to stop and the boat to reach safely back to its place.

Philosophical aspect

The philosophical aspect of the Nauka Charitra is that life journey that everyone crosses is similar to crossing of the river. In order to overcome all the hurdles in life, a complete devotion towards the supreme power is required. This can be achieved only through surrendering oneself to the Universe. In the second part of “Nauka Charitram”, Thyagaraja explains how surrendering to Krishna (Supreme power) would not only help the cross the river but also cross the river of births and deaths through Moksha.

The opera commences with invocation to Lord Ganapathi, Goddess Saraswathi. Thyagaraja explains that when the Gopi spend time with Lord Krishna, they forget their worries, house, family, property, etc., and devote their attention completely. In the similar manner, in order to attain the inner bliss, one has to surrender to the universe. Surrendering in this context implies that realizing that nothing is possible from their end and only supreme power can guide and lead them.

- In the daru, “Śrngāriṅcukōni, Vēḍaliri” set to Rāga Suruṭṭi, Thyagaraja brings out the Sringāra rasa. The gopi-s dress up beautifully. One of the gopi-s breaking with laughter, one of the tying the flowers, one of the combing his curls of hair, one of them teasing Krishna for fun, one of them kissing Krishna, one of the offerings him tām̄bhūla, one of them putting Tilaka on his forehead, etc., All these bring out the joyful imagination of Saint Thyagaraja. The samvādi sañcāra-s of rāga Suruṭṭi is well brought over in the below phrases:

„ŚN	ŚRĠĠ	ĠŚNŚ	NDP,		PMPD	PDNP	DPM,	MGR,	
„ Śṛṇ	Gā...	.. riñ.	cukō		ni		Vē.ḍa	li	

- In the kriti, “Ādavārella gūdi” set to rāga Yadukula Kambhoji, Lord Krishna is described as a prince adorned with jewels of nine precious gems in the lyrics, “Rājakumāru ḍu vī ḍu navaratnasommulu Bettina”. In the same kriti, in the kanda Padya, beauty of Krishna is mentioned as the one whose face is like a full moon, the whole world cannot treat him as a child as he would mesmerize them with his smile.

“Lokamulō ninu śiśuvani Cēkonarādanu paluku prasiddhamu gādē”

- In the kriti, “Cūdarē celulārā Yamuna dēvi” set to Pantuvarāli Rāga, the greatness of Yamuna River is explained. The beauty of the red lotus, the bees buzzing around them, the cool breeze signifying their unison with Lord Krishna, the body of the river is like black clouds, music emanating from the flock of swans, the steps on the river bank appear like diamonds touched by small waves. In the Padya, “Nallani Yamunā nadilō.”, it is described that in the black waters of Yamuna River, white coloured boat which is floating makes the Gopi-s amuse.

In the Padya “Bālum, ḍadigāka mahī

Pāluni tanayunḍa mēna – bangāru sommu”, Krishna is described as not only a child but also son of a king adorned with gold ornaments in the body and Gopi-s decided not to take him along with them out of fear.

- In the Kriti, “Yemani nera nammu”, Gopi-s say that how to rely upon Krishna who was hiding their garments when they were bathing, who had bit their lips when Tilaka is put on their forehead, one who was stealing and eating butter and smeared the butter on the faces of women, etc.,
- In the kriti, “Emēmo teliyaka” set to Raga Saurāshtra, various Puranic events have been mentioned showing the achievements of Lord Krishna. In the second charana, he is described as the one who rescued Gajendra from Crocodile in the words, “Karirāju makarice gāsi jendaga nenu karuna jūda lāda”, one who destroyed the arrogance of king of serpents Kaḷi in the words, “Kāḷindilōni Kāliyuni madamunu kāla nanapa lēda”.
- The kriti “Ōḍanu Jaripe” in Rāga Sāranga is very much suitable for singing song relevant to boat ride. From the sāhitya aspect, the Gōpi-s are enjoying the boat ride in various manner. Some of the Gopi-s are singing the glories of Krishna, some of the praying to Yamuna Devi, Some of them dancing, Some of the applying Thilaka for lord Krishna, etc., The starting svaras of the kriti reveals the essential phrase of Sāranga which is as follows:

„S,	,PM,	P,P,	P,,,		„PŚ	NDPM	DDPM	R,GM	
„ Ō	ḍanu	Jari	pe		Muc	ca.ta.	ra.na	rē..	

- In the kriti “Thanayandhe premayanusu” in Rāga Bhairavi, in the Padya “Vanitala hṛdayam beri”, it is specified that Brahma, Indra and other deva-s showered golden flowers in the form of rain and are watching the deeds of play performed by Krishna.
- In kriti, “Ēnōmu nōcītimō celula mē dāna mosagitimō” in Rāga Punnāgavarāḷi, the Gopi-s wonder about the charity they must have done in the previous incarnation to serve Lord Krishna with pleasure. Here, Thyagaraja explains that whatever actions performed has a corresponding reaction.
- In the kriti, “Evaru manaku sāmāna milalō” in Rāga Dēvagāndhāri, the Gōpi-s forget themselves due to the pride of their beauty and state that the four faced Brahma was infatuated by his own daughter Saraswathi and became attracted to her; Lord Hari was attracted by Brinda; Lord Siva surrendered to the wives of rishi-s in the Dārūka forest by taking the form of a youth and Lord Krishna was attracted towards them but is incapable of navigating the boat.

In the śārdūla, “Prākāripramukhul Vinodamulu”, Lord Krishna has decided that to put an end to their pride. Understanding Krishna’s mind, Indra and other Gods make heavy downpour of rains so that the boat gets flooded with water. The Gopi-s then recite, “Śrī kāruṇyanidhē harē!” and meditate upon Lord Krishna. The inner message is that in the state of pride, one must not forget themselves and utter wrong words.

Part 2

- In the kriti, “Unnatāvuna nuṇḍaniyyadu vāna” set to Ghanta Raga in Chapu Tāḷa, lotus eyed Krishna creates a severe storm with thundering clouds and a hold formed in the boat with water entering inside. In the lyrics “Ī rājānanu nāḍukonnaphalamo?” the Gopi-s discuss whether this is the outcome of teasing of moon-faced Krishna or this is the bad time of departing or curse of some deity. The philosophical content behind this is that pride goes before a fall and the hardships are faced only for realizing our mistakes and learning lessons from it.

- In the Kriti, “Alla kallōla māyenamma Yamunadevi” set to Saurāṣtram in Ādi Tāḷa, the Gopi-s worship Yamuna Devi with Jasmine flowers, surrender their jewellery to Yamuna river and to land Lord little Krishna safely in the destination. They have realized the wrong actions performed by them against little Lord Krishna by showing pride, ego, etc., in the Padya “Pāramu gānani yī bhava”

Lord who bestows the boons and takes us through the life in which shore cannot be seen, the Gopi-s are praying to Yamuna river for protecting him. In the Padya “Bālabhāvamutōnu”, the Gopi-s say that they have brought this ruling prince who goes to every house doing mischievous activities, and how Krishna can be handed back to his mother.

- in the kriti “Perugu Pālu bhujiyiñci” set to Ghanta Rāga, Gopi-s asks whether it is for this purpose that they had developed their physique by eating milk and curd, got boons from Lord Rama in their previous births and suffering in the river Yamuna?
- In the Kriti “indu kēmi Sētumma” set to Varāḷi rāga, in the verses “agaṇita lōkādhāruḍu nigamāgama sañcaruḍu”, Gopi-s requests Krishna who dwells in the Vēda-s and āgama-s, having pure heart, one who carried Parvata mountain to protect them.
- In the kriti “Hari Hari nī yokka” set to Punnāgavarāḷi rāga, when the Gopi-s feel that the water level in the boat has raised to their neck and they have lost their garments due to the heavy rain, in the padya, “nannē dhyānamu sēyucu” Lord Krishna advises them to meditate upon him closing the eyes and folded hands to overcome the situation. In the padya, “Vyādhulu galavāru vaidyuni Vārtalu”, just as sick people listen to the doctor with full faith, just as pregnant ladies listen to the words of nurse, just as servants listen to the words of their superior, Gopi-s listened to the words of Krishna and meditated upon him. The rain vanished and the boat came to the starting point, the Gopi-s got back their golden dresses, blouses and were overwhelmed with joy.
- In the kriti “Ganadamu Puyyarugā” set to Punnāgavarāḷi rāga, the Gopi-s spray Sandal paste on Lord, painted the Tilaka on his forehead, offered camphor flame decorated with pearls and worshipped him with complete devotion. Lord Krishna shines beautifully like the king of elephants among the group of elephants. Lord Brahma, Siva and others worshipped Lord Krishna with golden flowers seeing the beautiful events and the Gopi-s return back to their places.
- In the Mangala Kriti “Mā kulamula kiha para mosagina nīku” the Gopi-s show gratitude to Lord Krishna for the happiness bestowed to their families by protecting them

Conclusion

In the state of joyfulness, one tends to forget their state of mind and show pride, ego, hatred, etc. towards others. The well said saying, “As you sow so you reap”, means that whatever we give others we receive the same from Universe which is well evident in Gopi-s serving Lord Krishna. We surrender everything to the supreme power which is well evident of Gopika-s worshipping Lord Krishna and serving him. In the state of distress, meditating towards the Lord with empty mindedness helped them to completely surrender to the Universe and forgive them for the wrong deeds.

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